



## LEADER GUIDE

JOHN

SIGNPOSTS OF  
THE SAVIOR

### THE SIGN OF HIS POWER OVER DEATH

**BIG IDEA:** Jesus offers the hope of a new life.

**DATE:** Sunday, March 1 and Wednesday, March 4, 2026

**SCRIPTURE:** John 11:25-27; 38-44

### OPENING QUESTION

**What does it take for you to call the doctor?** *At the first sign of a cold or excruciating pain? Why do you think that is?*

*Some people head to the ER or Urgent Care at the sign of a cough. Others are very stubborn and refuse regular check-ups. Perhaps it was how they were raised or the deductible on their health plan. But behind every stubborn person is probably a family member begging them to seek help. A local pediatrician's office hands out booklet to every new parent titled, "When to Call the Doctor." (subtitled: Please do not call us every day!)*

*Transition to lesson: In today's scripture, we are going to read about a time when a friend of Jesus was gravely ill, and the family wanted Jesus to be there for them. They wanted THE perfect Doctor. When his death occurred, the family wrestled with what Jesus could have done if only He had been present in those moments. Yet we know there was a far greater purpose in the death and raising to life of Lazarus.*

### SETTING THE STAGE

Today we are studying the seventh and final sign: raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus's first miracle was at a wedding and His last takes place at a funeral. The story in John 11 begins with a family in crisis: Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus, who is gravely ill. These siblings lived in Bethany, a village near Jerusalem. Mary is identified as the woman who anointed Jesus's feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair, an act of worship and devotion that would occur later in John's Gospel. This seemingly spurious detail speaks to the deep connection between Jesus and the family. Understanding the closeness of their relationship, Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus, saying, "Lord, the one you love is sick" (John 11:3). This simple yet profound statement highlights both their faith in Jesus's love and their expectation that He will respond quickly to help.

*Upon hearing about Lazarus's illness, Jesus makes an unexpected declaration: "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (v. 4). These words shifted the perspective from the immediate crisis to a greater divine purpose. Jesus does not deny Lazarus's suffering but reframes it as part of God's plan to reveal His glory and power. Therefore, though Jesus loves this family deeply, He does not rush to Bethany. Instead, He stays where He is for two more days. This delay can seem perplexing, but it underscores that Jesus operates on a divine timetable and according to divine purposes - beyond what humans can*

grasp. As we will see, His delay sets the stage for a greater demonstration of His authority over life and death.

## SCRIPTURE READING

### John 11:25-27; 38-44 (CSB)

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" <sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world."

<sup>28</sup> Having said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." <sup>29</sup> As soon as Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. <sup>30</sup> Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw that Mary got up quickly and went out. They followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to cry there. <sup>32</sup> As soon as Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and told him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died!"

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you put him?" he asked. "Lord," they told him, "come and see." <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Couldn't he who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup> "Remove the stone," Jesus said. Martha, the dead man's sister, told him, "Lord, there is already a stench because he has been dead four days." <sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

<sup>41</sup> So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you heard me. <sup>42</sup> I know that you always hear me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so that they may believe you sent me." <sup>43</sup> After he said this, he shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unwrap him and let him go."

## DISCUSSION

### READ JOHN 11:25-27

Summarize what Jesus told Martha in verses 25-26.

Martha was grieving and struggling to reconcile the death of her brother with the claims of Jesus. Jesus asked her if she believed His words. Not just that she believed in a coming resurrection, but that He *is* the resurrection.

Jesus states a truth about Himself, then asks Martha a question. What does He ask her? What does her response reveal?

Even on her darkest day, Martha confesses her faith in Jesus – “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.” The most important question we will ever answer is “Who is Jesus to me?” And do I still answer it the same way when I am going through my darkest day?

Note, it doesn't matter how we answer the question “Who is Jesus?” because He *is* the Son of God whether we believe it or not. But it *does* matter how we answer, ‘Who is Jesus to *me*?’ Because it shows we believe in Him and put our faith in Him. That changes our earthly life and eternal destiny.

We can savor the peace of Jesus because He is the source of resurrection life. Even in death - our own or those we love - we can savor peace knowing that we pass from earthly life to eternal life if we belong to Jesus.

**READ JOHN 11:28-37 out loud to your group:** (these verses are not included in the Discussion Guide) and then **RECAP:** Jesus found Mary weeping. Mary expressed an authentic loss over her brother's passing. Like her sister Martha, she believed that Jesus's presence would have made a difference. The time of grief was soon overshadowed, though, by those present with Mary and Martha. Others at the tomb would have included Jewish mourners, family, and friends. The mourners were like those present at Jarius's house when his daughter died; they were paid by the family to be there, which was a part of the customs during this time.

#### **READ JOHN 11:38-40**

What do we learn about Jesus from His emotional response at the tomb of His friend?

**ASK:** What do you think Jesus's disciples were thinking when they saw Him respond in this way?

When Jesus saw Mary and the mourners crying., He was *deeply moved in His spirit* (John 11:33).

Let's look at the two Greek words used in verse 33 to better understand Jesus's emotions.

1. The text first says Jesus was “deeply moved in [his] spirit” (CSB, ESV, NIV), “groaned the spirit” (NKJV), “a deep anger welled up within him” (NLT). This phrase is the Greek word *enebrimesato* which literally means “to snort like a horse” and “generally connotes anger.” Most commentators agree Jesus was not angry at Mary or Martha but at death itself.
2. The text then adds that Jesus was “troubled” (CSB, NIV, NKJV), “deeply troubled” (NLT), “greatly troubled” (ESV), which is translated from the Greek word *etaraxen* which “expresses agitation, confusion, or disorganization.” Jesus was not apathetic in the situation. He shared in the common feeling of grief with those He loved.

Then in verse 35 we simply read, “Jesus wept.”

Jesus knew God's glory and peoples' belief were godly purposes for His delay, but Jesus is as fully human as He is God. Mary wept, the mourners cried, and Jesus entered their pain. Death angered Him and its painful effects grieved Him. He expressed human emotions, including tears.

A lot of us have experienced grief over losing a loved one. We were probably angry, confused and deeply troubled. What are some things that helped you in dealing with your grief? Who is grieving a loss that you could reach out to?

**ENCOURAGE your group with this truth:** When we face loss or struggle, remember that Jesus is the resurrection and the life – that eternal life is waiting for us as His believing children. We can have strength and hope as we walk through our darkest valleys for Jesus has broken the curse of sin and death!

Use the commentary to explain the significance of Lazarus being dead *four* days.

In verse 39 Jesus tells Martha to remove the stone of Lazarus' grave, but she objects.

Draw 5 circles ("stones") on the white board.

**ASK:** What are some stones or barriers to belief that people have today? (You may get responses like needs proof; doesn't feel a need to be saved; believes there is no god; sees Christians as hypocrites or unloving, they blame God for their suffering, etc.)

People today want evidence first and then belief. Jesus calls us to believe first and then we "see the glory of God." Don't give up on the people God has placed in your life who do not believe. God does the saving through Jesus and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, but we are called to be His witnesses and share our testimony.

Now look at these "stones" on the board again and think of yourself. What excuses or barriers prevent *us* from obeying God's commands?

**READ JOHN 11:41-44**

**DISCUSS:** Jesus offered a prayer showing that the complete plan and purpose of God was set in motion before this moment. The prayer was edifying for the crowd, who was watching and listening to Jesus. The prayer was about what would happen *after* this moment, and the lives that would be impacted. Jesus knew full well that someone could see this miracle and begin to either believe or reject Him.

- Have you ever thanked God for a prayer He hasn't yet answered?
- How has God grown your faith by the way He has acted in someone else's life?
- What are some lessons we can learn from this seventh sign from Jesus?

## RESPONSE

Consider the different people gathered at this amazing scene. Which one do you relate to?

**Leaders: take some time for this closing activity. Have people group up in 3's to discuss these characters:**

- Martha: You know the right things about what it means to follow Jesus; you can quote verses, but when it comes to personally applying truth to your life, you struggle.
- Mary: You delay being in the presence of Jesus.
- People in the crowd: You respond more with skepticism and continue in false emotion rather than experiencing the true nature of Jesus.
- Lazarus: You need new life! You have been feeling dead spiritually and need to respond or recommit to the call of Jesus.

## READING PLAN

3/1 – Matthew 3; 3/2 – Matthew 4; 3/3 – Luke 3; 3/4 – Hebrews 9; 3/5 – Hebrews 10; 3/6 – Revelation 5; 3/7 – John 1; *Memory Verse - Hebrews 10:22*

## COMMENTARY

### JOHN 11:25-27

**Connection to the Point: Jesus is the resurrection and the life.**

**Context.** While the central focus of all four Gospels is Jesus's death, burial and resurrection, the Gospel of John spends almost half of the book discussing Jesus's final week. This session looks at the final verses before John's recounting of Jesus's final week (chapter 12). In 11:1-24, John began the story of Lazarus's death. Lazarus is described to Jesus as "the one you love" (v. 3). John used a similar phrase to designate his own relationship with Jesus – as the disciple whom Jesus loved. In both cases, John emphasized that Jesus is the originator of love and friendship. While Lazarus and John can both be described as Jesus's friends, Jesus is the originating source of the love and friendship. Lazarus's death had the potential to be a crisis, but in God's sovereignty and Jesus's power and compassion, Lazarus's death became an opportunity for Jesus's disciples to believe (v. 15).

**Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.** These three were siblings from a town called Bethany. The town's name means something like "house of the figs/dates" or possibly "house of suffering." It is mentioned in all four of the Gospels and was a small village located near Jerusalem, on the east of the Mount of Olives. In addition to the story of Lazarus's raising told in these verses, Bethany played a prominent role and was the location of at least two other significant events in the life of Jesus. First, as referenced in 11:2, Lazarus's sister, Mary, anointed Jesus with expensive perfume (Mark 14:3-9) and wiped His feet with her hair (Luke 7:38). It was also the town near which Jesus ascended into heaven (24:50-51).

Some New Testament scholars have argued that Mary of Bethany is Mary Magdalene and have also argued that she is the same sinner mentioned in Luke 7.

**"I am the resurrection and the life" (v. 25).** This is the fifth and perhaps the greatest "I am" statement Jesus made in the Gospel of John. Each and every time Jesus declares "I am," He is declaring He is God who has come in the flesh. The Hebrew phrase "I am" is the grammatical basis of His name that God reveals to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14), and it stands behind the Greek phrase used here.

The various "I am" statements Jesus made also serve to unpack and explain what it means for Jesus to be God incarnate. Death is not victorious over the life Jesus brings. Jesus both *brings* resurrection and life and *is* the resurrection and the life.

**"Even if he dies...will never die" (vv. 25-26)** Due to the fall in Genesis 3, physical death will come to everyone until Jesus's return. Eternal death waits for those who are outside of Christ. Eternal life waits for those who are in Christ. In the previous chapter, Jesus had told the Jews that His sheep

were eternally secure in His hands (10:28). The theme of eternal life is prominent throughout John's Gospel (6:50; 8:51). The eternal life theme also appears in his first letter (1 John 5:13).

**"You are the Messiah" (v. 27).** Directly translated, Messiah means "Anointed One." The idea is used throughout the Old Testament about various individuals who were anointed by God to carry out various tasks. Messiah is one of the key concepts tying the Old Testament to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the Messiah is a figure who will come to be the Davidic king from the line of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and who will sit on the throne of David forever. In Matthew 16, Peter famously confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus affirmed Peter's confession and told him this knowledge was given to him as a gift by the Father.

**"The Son of God" (v. 27).** From the first New Testament book (Matt. 16:16) to the final book (Rev. 21:18), Son of God is a prominent title used of Jesus. John used this term almost exclusively of Jesus. When writing about believers, he preferred the term "children of God." On four occasions, John added "one and only" to the phrase. Sometimes John simply used the phrase "the Son," and apparently expected the reader to supply "of God" (John 3:35-36; 5:19-23, 26; 6:40; 8:36).

### **John 11:38-40**

**Connection to the Point.** The glory of God is revealed as Jesus works on our behalf.

**Context.** In verses 28-37, Jesus was confronted by Mary - much as he had been earlier by Martha - and arrived at the tomb of Lazarus. Both sisters confessed that if Jesus had been present earlier, their brother would not have died. Martha also confessed she believed Jesus could ask anything from God and God would grant it. Mary seems overcome with grief at her brother's death and simply fell at Jesus's feet. We should not conclude Martha had greater faith than her sister but rather observed that Martha continued to be more proactive than Mary.

**Deeply moved (v. 38).** This Greek phrase is difficult to understand. Translating it deeply moved maintains the uncertainty. The difficulty in translation carries over what was surely a complexity in Jesus's emotions. While we want to always maintain the biblical teaching that Jesus is fully God, we should also maintain the biblical teaching that Jesus is fully human. Since He is both fully God and fully human, Jesus's emotional life was exceptionally complex. As a man, He was saddened at the death of His friend. As God, He was saddened at his followers' unbelief. The people were mourning the death of Lazarus even after Jesus had clearly said his sickness would not result in death. Furthermore, Jesus had already promised to "wake him up." Finally, Jesus said Lazarus would "rise again." This complexity of emotions is visualized in what is famously known as the shortest verse in the Bible - "Jesus wept" (v. 35).

**The tomb (v. 38).** Wealthy individuals often had elaborate tombs like the one Jesus occupied. Meanwhile, the poor, criminals, and foreigners sometimes had their bodies thrown into communal graves. Lazarus must have been a man of some wealth. Most likely he was laid on a bench in a hollowed-out cave with a plan to move his bones into a box called an ossuary about one year after death. And that way, the same tomb would be used for others who died.

**"A stench" (v.39).** Some translations use a phrase like "bad odor" for the Greek phrase here, but the smell emanating from the tomb was much worse than that. In an era before embalming and refrigeration, a dead body would have begun to decompose quickly. The resultant odor would have been overwhelmingly putrid. As such, Martha's concerns were very reasonable. By reporting her concerns, John confirmed Luke's portrayal of Martha as being very pragmatic and concerned with the physical things in life. Her concern about the stench seemingly reversed her earlier

professed belief that God would do anything Jesus asked. Martha's faith was inconsistent at best and contradictory at worst. This event is similar to the father, whose son was possessed by a spirit, when he declared, "I do believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Praise the Lord that He saves us not according to the strength of our faith but according to His power!

**"Dead four days" (v. 39).** The mention of *four days* is an important detail. In fact, it is so important that John not only mentioned it here but also in verse 17. The reason that four days is significant is because the Jewish superstition held that a dead person's spirit waited by the body for three days looking for an opportunity to return to the body. However, on the fourth day, it was believed the body had decomposed to the point the spirit gave up trying to return. This detail is also given to reinforce the idea that the stench of the dead body would have been unbearably rancid.

**"See the glory of God" (v. 40).** The glory of God is an attribute of God that we speak and write about frequently, but it is not easily grasped. The Hebrew word that is translated *glory* in the Old Testament is connected to the idea of weight. The Greek word used here is connected to the honor given to rulers like Julius Caesar. It is a focused praise given to a human ruler. However, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the glory of God is not usually something that can be viewed by human eyes. However, when the New Testament speaks about God's glory as being visible, the Bible is painting a picture of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, and the reader is given a glimpse of what the new heavens and the new earth will be like - a place without sin, death, or evil.

#### **John 11:41-44**

**Connection to the Point.** The work of Jesus draws us to put our faith in Him.

**Raised his eyes (v. 41).** Jesus's posture of prayer was in line with the ordinary Jewish posture of prayer. In the Jewish worldview, God lived in the highest heaven, so by raising His eyes, Jesus was directing all attention to God the Father. In case those present at the tomb did not correctly interpret Jesus's nonverbal cues of raising His eyes, He began His prayer with, **Father**. Jesus is fully God and is able to perform miracles according to His own authority, but He spoke to the Father in this way "so that they may believe You sent me" (v 42).

**A loud voice (v. 43).** The Greek words of this phrase are *phone* [voice, sound] *megas* [great] and thus could be directly translated "megaphone." The image of God calling into the darkness and watery depths before creation, "Let there be light," in Genesis 1:3 could come to the reader's mind as we read these words. The Creator was speaking. His creation would respond. Jesus used a loud voice because He wanted the people gathered around the tomb to see the power of God.

**The dead man came out (v. 44).** In compliance with Jesus's words, Lazarus returned to life and exited the tomb where he had been placed. It should be noted that Lazarus was only resuscitated - one day he would die again. Meanwhile, Jesus was resurrected to never die again. Given this reality, it is likely that Lazarus was put back into this very tomb when he eventually dies a second time. Jesus, of course, never returned to the tomb in which He was placed, since He is "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18) and now sits victoriously on His throne in heaven with the Father (Rev. 3:21).

**Bound hand and foot (v. 44).** *Hand and foot* here represent the whole body. John may have been giving us these details in order to foreshadow the fact that Lazarus was wrapped in a similar way to how Jesus would be wrapped after His death - including having a separate piece of cloth used to wrap His head (20:6-7). John may also have been describing Lazarus's hands and feet as

being bound in order to give the readers a picture of what must have been a struggle for Lazarus as he *came out* from the grave. One minute Lazarus was dead. The next minute he was alive but wrapped in the clothes of a dead man and trying to make his way towards the voice of his dear friend Jesus.

**“Unwrap him” (v. 44).** Raising Lazarus from the dead was the seventh and final sign-miracle that John recorded in His Gospel. **In previous miracles, Jesus was establishing for His followers (and those observers open to understanding) His authority over various elements in the world. In this miracle, Jesus clearly demonstrates that He has the power over death.** Notice that the focus of this miracle is on Jesus and not on Lazarus. Lazarus did not even speak in the passage, much less take center stage in John’s recounting of this miracle. The miracles that Jesus performed were meant to point people to Him and His Kingdom and to testify that the kingdom was “at hand” (Mark 1:15, KJV).

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